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THE EFFECT OF PROXIMAL CARCERAL CONTACT ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A Thesis Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Designation
University Honors

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University of Northern Iowa

2021

This Study by: Emily Loomis

Entitled: The Effect of Proximal Carceral Contact on Political Participation

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation
University Honors.

Date

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Date

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Research Purpose

In light of the events of the summer of 2020 with the murder of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breanna Taylor, the United States has seen nationwide protests. The purpose of this research is to further examine the relationship between the criminal justice system and the individuals who come into indirect contact with it. The carceral state, or criminal justice system, has expanded rapidly in the last fifty years. An institution of its size and influence has far-reaching consequences, including on those who do not directly come into contact with it. This can affect how everyday citizens interact with the state generally.

The rise of the institution of the carceral state has played a large role in the ever-expanding nature of political participation, for which political science has tried to account. As such, the research in this area has grown and evolved over time. There has been some research done on the impact of incarceration on one's participation but not as much research exists studying the influence of proximal contact with the criminal justice system upon one's political participation. This paper aims to take that research further by focusing on the effects of proximal contact with the carceral state on one's political participation, broadly defined. In sum, the existent research of the effects of proximal contact with the carceral state is unsatisfactory--this paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature and to better understand the implications of a far-reaching carceral state presence in the lives of everyday citizens.

Based upon existent political science and criminal justice research, I hypothesize that increased proximal contacts with the carceral state will increase political participation; and, 2), that this effect is greater among nonwhites than it is among whites. I test these hypotheses by analyzing the results of a national survey, finding that there is a positive relationship between

proximal contact with the carceral state and political participation, but that there is no significant relationship between race, proximal contact, and political participation.

Literature Review

The Carceral State

The carceral state can be understood as the institution that functions as the law enforcement arm of the state (Alexander 2012; Walker 2014; Weaver and Lerman 2010). This is not limited to police agencies but also incorporates the court and prison systems as well. This study will use both the carceral state and the criminal justice system as effectively meaning the same thing.

The scope and reach of the carceral state into the lives of everyday citizens has expanded over the past fifty years (Alexander 2012). Every day, individuals interact with the carceral state in a variety of ways, both positively and negatively. These interactions can inform a person about the world around them, thereby shaping the way individuals interact with their communities, families, and friends. It is these interactions that I am most interested in. How does knowing someone who was illegally searched by the police influence the way that person interacts with the political sphere? What effect on a person's desire to protest or lobby does having a personal connection to someone whom the judicial system reunited with their children have? The carceral state's expansion implies that more people know an increasing number of friends or family members who have interacted with it in some way.

Moreover, research indicates that the interaction between the carceral state and individuals is racially significant. Persons of color, specifically black Americans, are disproportionately represented in their interactions with the carceral state (Alexander 2012; Weaver and Lerman 2010, 817; Uggen, Larson, and Shannon 2016). The effects of the carceral state, therefore, are felt disproportionately along racial lines. At nearly every level, the carceral state operates differently with regards to people of color, as compared to their white counterparts.

Comprehending this racial difference in treatment and outcome is essential to the larger context of this research and will be useful to know when analyzing the gathered data. Alex R. Piquero (2008) discusses one aspect of this disparity in his research regarding the juvenile justice system, noting, “At each stage of the system, minority representation grows larger and at a faster rate than that of whites” (60). For example, Mitchell and Caudy (2015) write that the War on Drugs was experienced differently among juveniles based on race, noting that “In 1990, African-American juveniles had drug arrest rates that were six times higher than whites. Thus, in a 10-year period white and black juveniles went from having equal drug arrest rates to black juveniles having a rate six times higher than whites” (291). Children of color--especially black children--are overrepresented at every level of the juvenile criminal justice system, from arrest to sentencing (NCCD). The more one is in contact with the carceral state as a child, the greater the likelihood is for a person to interact with the criminal justice system as an adult, thus creating a cycle of carceral contact that is racially disparate (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein 2003).

Additionally, racial disparities manifest within the criminal justice system outside of the juvenile realm. One place that this disparity can be found is among the treatment of drug offenses. Alexander (2012) points to the War on Drugs as a key moment in the United States that became a foundational component of mass incarceration. This claim is echoed and further supported by the research of Mitchell and Caudy (2015). They describe the War on Drugs as follows:

First and foremost, the focus of drug control was expanded from international efforts at drug crop reduction, interdiction at the borders, and apprehension of major drug traffickers to now include mid- and low-level dealers and even drug users. Second, the War on Drugs sought to discourage drug use and involvement in the drug trade primarily by utilizing punitive criminal justice sanctions, instead of alternative drug control mechanisms (e.g. drug use prevention, drug treatment, harm reduction) (Mitchell and Caudy 2015, 289).

The War on Drugs mandated punitive sentencing on nearly all drug offenses, even low-level offenses. The result of the War on Drugs is still being seen today: mass incarceration levels for drug offenses, over 20 years after its implementation (Mitchell and Caudy 2015, 290).

The War on Drugs has had a lasting impact on policing, sentencing, and incarceration rates. For the purposes of this paper, the War on Drugs is notable for an additional reason--racially disproportionate outcomes. At the peak of the War on Drugs, the comparative ratio of the arrest rate for black individuals and white individuals, respectively, was 5.5 to 1 (Mitchell and Caudy 2015, 289; Human Rights Watch 2009). Mitchell and Caudy (2015) further state, "Since 1990, on average, this ratio has been approximately 4.5 to 1" (291). The War on Drugs has had a lasting effect on the population makeup of those interacting with the carceral state and the disparities found between black and white offenders "cannot be explained by race differences in the extent of drug offending, nor the nature of drug offending" (Mitchell and Caudy 2015, 309).

Beyond the differences in drug crime sentencing, people of color also experience disparities in plea bargaining and federal sentencing when compared to their white counterparts. While there is some judicial consistency within sentencing across racial lines, Steffensmeier and Demuth (2000) find that Hispanic defendants--particularly, drug offenders--receive harsher sentences than their white or black counterparts. Steffensmeier and Demuth (2000) describe a number of reasons why this may be the case, but conclude that their main finding "provides strong evidence for the continuing significance of race and ethnicity in the larger society in general and in organizational decision-making processes in particular" (726). Similarly, Berdejó (2018) discusses both the persistence of racial bias in the plea-bargaining system and its consequences in low-information and lower severity cases. He states:

White defendants are more likely than black defendants to receive a reduction in their principal initial charge. As a result, white defendants who face initial felony charges are

more likely than black defendants to end up being convicted of misdemeanors rather than more serious crimes. Similarly, white defendants initially charged with misdemeanors are more likely than black defendants to be convicted for crimes carrying no possible incarceration or not being convicted at all (Berdejó 2018, 1241).

The persistence of racial differences in both plea-bargaining and within sentencing is crucial to the overall production of racial bias within the carceral state. These factors compound and feed into themselves, continuously reproducing the racial disparities within the criminal justice system.

Crime--or rather, getting caught for a crime--is often a factor of location as well as economic class. That is to say, if one lives in a lower-income area that is heavily policed then they will have a greater likelihood of being stopped by the police as compared to community members from a less policed neighborhood. Because of this, class distinctions, in addition to and in conjunction with racial disparities, must be addressed in terms of carceral interactions. A macro-view of economic class and criminality is useful to consider here. The mass movement of large businesses and corporations out of the United States to source out cheaper labor led to a massive loss in quality, well-paying jobs for the middle class. Many of these factory jobs did not require a lot, if any, college education. The exodus of such work created a large swath of the population who were out of work and struggling to find more. Cities like Detroit, once an economic powerhouse full of jobs and prosperity, became a shell of their former capacity. Some researchers have concluded that the strength of the economy and one's resources may impact the likelihood that one commits a criminal offense. Grant and Martínez Jr. (1997) expand upon existing research to determine if unemployment and feelings of class adversity increase property and total crime rates. They conclude, "...the unemployment rate has a powerful effect on crime rates, particularly property-related crimes" and class perceptions/adversity "...exert significant effects on total crime rate and property-crime rate" (Grant and Martínez 1997, 790). Most

basically, crime rates are impacted by economics, specifically unemployment and other economic disadvantages.

A 2004 study finds that incarceration is stratified by both race and education level, a common indicator of economic class (Pettit and Western 2004). Pettit and Western (2004) continue to note that the trends among non-college educated and high school dropouts, in terms of criminal records or imprisonment, are markedly different among black and white men. “[W]e find a pattern of stability in which incarceration rates and cumulative risks of incarceration are, on average, 6 to 8 times higher for young black men compared to young whites,” write Pettit and Western (2004, 164). A small caveat can be made here that class inequality has also grown over the past 50 years in the United States. Along with this increase, there has also been a rise in incarceration rates across racial boundaries as well, particularly among men with only a high school education (Pettit and Western 2004, 164). Even so, black men were disproportionately represented in this increase (Alexander 2012).

“We thus understand crime to be politically motivated, and, loosely speaking, a collective response, though not necessarily in the extreme sense of being an organized and calculated attempt to bring about revolution,” note Grant and Martínez Jr. (1997, 776). Their understanding of criminality is important to underscore because it intersects with existent research about direct contact with the carceral state and how that may affect one’s perceptions about the political system as a whole (Weaver and Lerman 2010). If Grant and Martínez Jr.’s (2004) claimed motivations are correct, then the disillusionment of both poverty and racial disparities could feed into increasing interactions with the carceral state. Add to this the lineage of redlining and historically low-income areas being populated by persons of color and a feedback loop is created--people of color are disproportionately represented in lower-income areas,

disproportionately represented in interactions with the carceral state, and the combination of these factors can impact their political participation.

The salience of race in the carceral state has not diminished over time but rather has remained to be a constant factor that must be accounted for in subsequent research. In short, one's race matters in terms of both political participation as well as chances for direct and indirect contact with the carceral state.

Political Participation

Political participation is the bedrock of the American political system. As such, it is a vital element of my study. Even so, not everyone participates in American politics, even when we include non-electoral participation in the measure. Often, political participation is limited to voting. Doing so, particularly in the U.S., raises a number of issues and often ignores the valuable ways that people choose to engage in the American political system in ways other than voting.

Bearing this in mind, discussion of U.S. voter turnout is necessary as it showcases an additional reason for my research focusing on non-electoral measures of political participation. In 2020, the United States saw record levels of voter turnout (Schaul, Rabinowitz, and Mellnik 2020). Even so, the record level of participation seen in 2020 is not the norm for much of American politics, nor did this extraordinary turnout include every voting-eligible person in the United States. The following table shows the last ten presidential election years and the corresponding turnout of voters, as a share of the voting-eligible population (Schaul, Rabinowitz, and Mellnik 2020):

Table 1. Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1984-2020 presidential elections (*As a share of the voting-eligible population*).

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1984 | 55.2% |
| 1988 | 52.8% |
| 1992 | 58.1% |
| 1996 | 51.7% |
| 2000 | 54.2% |
| 2004 | 60.1% |
| 2008 | 61.6% |
| 2012 | 58.6% |
| 2016 | 60.1% |
| 2020 | 66.3% |

Compared to other comparable democracies, the United States’ voter turnout is very low (DeSilver 2020). DeSilver (2020), writing for the PEW Research Center, also states, “Looking at the most recent nationwide election in each OECD nation, the U.S. places 30th out of 35 nations for which data is available.” American voter turnout continues to fall as we get further removed from the office of the President and into state and local elections. Even during the record-breaking mid-term election of 2018, only “Fifty-three percent of the citizen voting-age population” voted, “...the highest midterm turnout in four decades” (Misra 2020). Again, this amount tapers even more so in state and local elections. In short, America’s voter turnout is low which is why it is logical to use a broader definition of political participation that accounts for the variety of ways Americans stay engaged in politics even non-electorally.

Protesting, lobbying, campaigning, and donating are a few ways that people may participate in politics. Each of these are an important aspect of civic engagement and have,

historically, made large impacts on the United States. The Pew Research Center (2018) analyzes Americans' political participation as "by volunteering for or donating to campaigns, attending protests or meetings, contacting officials or expressing their views on social media." They find that "a large majority (67%) reports having engaged in at least one of these activities in the past five years; nearly half (46%) say they have done so in the past year alone." While these numbers are promising, the Pew Research Center (2018) also notes that those who were the most likely to be politically active were often older, more educated, and more ideological but that there were a few important exceptions to this finding. While older adults were more likely to have donated to a campaign or reach out to a political representative, those under 30 were more likely to attend a political rally or event and "are also about as likely as older adults to have publicly expressed support for a political campaign on social media in the last year (and more likely to have done so in the last five years)" (Pew Research Center 2018). Americans participate in politics in a litany of ways. Accounting for and understanding the variety of possible avenues of political participation is something that is increasingly necessary within political science research because it allows researchers to better understand the American populace and how they choose to interact with politics.

Things such as one's race, income level, and political affiliation can influence the level of one's engagement with politics (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Campbell 2013; Shaw, Foster, and Combs 2019). These are elements that are commonly controlled within political science research regarding someone's political participation. For example, Shaw, Foster, and Combs (2019) conclude that "...Latinos who live in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of poverty are susceptible to political demobilization..." while not finding a strong relationship between black persons living in poverty and political demobilization (668). Moreover, there is

some disagreement among political scientists about which factors impact a person's participation more than others. Campbell (2013) states that all elements of political participation can be argued to have a social dimension which the existing research does not account for. Similarly, Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) conclude that the relationship between socioeconomic status and someone's participation in politics is not fully understood and should be accounted for in terms of resources and access to those resources. This, according to the authors, will better explain the traditional relationship between the two variables (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). With so much variety and study having been done on factors influencing participation, it is crucial that my study controls for these traditional variables in order to effectively analyze the relationship between proximal carceral contact and political participation.

Proximal Contact

Current research about the effects of carceral contact on political participation indicates that direct contact with the carceral state decreases the participation of individuals (Gerber et al. 2017; Weaver and Lerman 2010; White 2019). However, there is less data about the effects of indirect contact with the carceral state on an individual's political participation. In this case, a holistic understanding of political participation is useful because it helps capture a more inclusive view of political participation in the United States.

The research with regards to proximal interactions with the carceral state is a little less clear than the research focusing on direct interactions with the carceral state. The studies of a person's likelihood to vote after incarceration reveal that their likelihood to be civically engaged is low (Alexander 2012, 158-161; Burmila 2017, 76-77; Gerber et al. 2017; Weaver and Lerman 2010; White 2019). In contrast, the effects of one indirectly interacting with the carceral state are ambiguous. For example, Hannah Walker (2014) concludes that proximal contact can mobilize

one's civic participation in ways other than voting, such as protesting. Walker writes again in 2020 that proximal contact with the carceral state may in fact motivate individuals in political ways.

Conversely, Weaver and Lerman (2010) note that proximal contact lowers people's faith in the political system entirely since the carceral state is the only representation of politics that one may come into contact with. They write, "...they [the results] suggest that those with contact at every level of criminal supervision withdraw from political life..." including withdrawal from civic groups, decreased likelihood to vote, and lower trust in government (Weaver and Lerman 2010, 831). Similarly, researchers Cohen and Luttig (2020) conclude that while accounting for knowledge about carceral violence shows that black Americans are politically knowledgeable, that same awareness also decreases their likelihood to participate in politics.

Lee, Porter, and Comfort (2014) also write at length about the effects of familial incarceration on non-incarcerated family members' political participation. Lee, Porter, and Comfort (2014) state that familial interactions with the carceral state shape the political knowledge of the related partners and children of those who have been incarcerated. Similar to Weaver and Lerman (2010), the authors conclude that proximal interactions with the carceral state "complicate perceptions of government legitimacy and fairness and serve as a barrier to civic participation" (Lee, Porter, and Comfort 2014). In contrast, White (2018) finds that while there may be a short-term demobilizing effect for those who have incarcerated family members, there is not a long term, negative turnout effect of familial incarceration on one's voting behavior. Better understanding the effects of distrust in the legitimacy system on political participation is a large part of why this current study is necessary.

While Walker's (2014; 2020) findings are not in direct opposition with Weaver and Lerman (2010), her findings do starkly differ from Cohen and Luttig's (2020) and Lee, Porter, and Comfort's (2014) conclusions. The question remains, why are Walker's conclusions different and how can the difference be accounted for (2014; 2020)?

Hypotheses

Much of the current research about the carceral state and political participation focuses on two things: direct carceral contact and voting. Much less research exists examining the potential impact that indirect contact with the carceral state may have on people--specifically, little is understood about the possible effects of proximal contact on people's non-electoral participation. The focus on voting as the only form of political participation, rather than a holistic, inclusive measure of participation further hinders this understanding. There are a number of ways individuals choose to participate that are not voting. Moreover, the importance of race within the criminal justice system and in the U.S. more broadly also shifts the argument of this study further. The research shows that people of color interact with the carceral state at disproportionate levels. Because of this, there is a possibility that the proximal interactions individuals have with the carceral state are also different along racial lines.

Building off of current political participation research, Hannah Walker's works, and the existing research of the racially disparate outcomes of the carceral state, I formulate my hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis One: Proximal contact will increase one's political participation in non-electoral manners.

Hypothesis Two: The effect of proximal contact with the carceral state on a person's political participation is greater among nonwhites than it is in whites.

This study begins to fill the gap within the existing research and aims to better capture the impact of the presence of an expanding carceral system on individuals' non-electoral political participation. The events of the summer of 2020, with the murder of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breanna Taylor, has ignited the nation. Because of this, the amount of individuals who are indirectly interacting with the carceral state has exploded. In sum, the current research about the relationships between political participation and the carceral state is missing a large element: indirect carceral contact. Accounting for this element allows us to better comprehend the wide-ranging, unintended effects of a large carceral system and can give insight into the broader, indirect effects of such a system in the lives of U.S. citizens.

Data and Methods

I test these hypotheses on a nationally representative sample collected as part of the Cooperative Election Study (2020). The CES is:

a 50,000+ person national stratified sample survey administered by YouGov. Half of the questionnaire consists of Common Content asked of all 50,000+ people, and half of the questionnaire consists of Team Content designed by each individual participating team and asked of a subset of 1,000 people (CCES 2020).

As such, I placed a question relating to proximal contact with the carceral state on one of the survey modules.¹ My question was added to the post-election part of the survey and was asked after the November election². Using the CES is beneficial because it allows me to be narrow in my own question and is cost-efficient for the amount of data access I had once it was released in March. The sample included 1,000 participants in an initial pre-election survey, 853 of whom also participated in a 10 minute post-election wave. My analysis focuses on the 853 people who completed both waves of the study.

The dependent variable in my study is political participation. Political participation does not just refer to voting (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Campbell 2013). I define participation as the variety of ways in which persons engage with a state's political sphere. The definitional understanding of political participation employed throughout this study includes protesting, lobbying, donating, and other forms of activism such as social media campaigns. By defining this broadly, I achieve a more cohesive understanding of how individuals see

¹ I want to thank Dr. Kyle Endres for helping me to get my question on the CES survey.

² The CES recruits respondents through online advertisements and through other survey providers. According to the CES (2020), "A large portion of the CCES respondents are YouGov panelists. These are people who have made an account on yougov.com to receive periodic notifications about new surveys." YouGov is a global data and public opinion company through which the CES and other companies have access to a large pool of respondents. The CES also does not include every respondent, in order to achieve a nationally representative sample. The YouGov participants are compensated by getting points for taking the survey. Those points, once the participant has garnered enough, can then be exchanged for gift cards or other prizes.

themselves responding to proximal interactions with the criminal justice system, even if they withdraw from the voting process. Political participation is measured through a participation battery--respondents choose all that apply to them and the score is tallied out of nine. There is also the option to select “none of these” effectively rendering a score of zero. The participation battery included in the survey allowed for multiple selections and highlighted nine different types of possible participation. The question appeared as follows:

During the past 12 months, have you done any of the following? Mark all that apply.

- ☐ Attended a meeting to talk about political or social concerns
- ☐ Joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration
- ☐ Posted a message or comment online about a political issue or campaign
- ☐ Tried to persuade anyone to vote one way or another
- ☐ Given money to any candidate running for public office, any political party, or any other group that supported or opposed candidates
- ☐ Gotten into a political argument with someone
- ☐ Tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives
- ☐ Worked to help a candidate or their campaign
- ☐ Worked with other people to deal with some issue facing your community
- ☐ None of these

The main independent variable in my hypotheses is proximal contact, which I define as excluding exposure. The world is increasingly interconnected and, in terms of accessibility, individuals have more access to more information than ever before. It is clear that people are exposed to a greater amount of issues online and respond to that exposure during certain times (Choudhury et al. 2017; Stieglitz et al. 2018). As such, it is crucial to differentiate between exposure to the carceral state and proximal contact with the carceral state. Exposure is a broad term that can be construed to include nearly anyone who has seen videos or information about the carceral state online. Due to the events of summer 2020--specifically, the murders of George

Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breanna Taylor--many people came into contact with ideas and critiques about the carceral state without having proximal contact with it. As such, a distinction must be made between exposure and proximal contact. For the purposes of this research project, I adhere to Walker's (2014; 2020) definition: "knowing one or multiple people who have had personal contact [with the carceral state] but not having had personal contact..." with the carceral state oneself (Walker 2020, 810). This definition excludes exposure to the carceral state and necessitates a direct link to an individual with direct carceral contact. By defining proximal contact in this manner, it eliminates the conflation between the measure and the potential exposure that one may have to these issues online. I measure proximal contact by asking respondents the following question:

Have any of your close friends or family members been arrested, charged with a crime, or questioned by the police (even if they weren't guilty), excluding minor traffic stops such as speeding? Select all that apply.

1. Yes, a close friend or family member has been arrested
2. Yes, a close friend or family member has been charged with a crime
3. Yes, a close friend or family member has been questioned by police
4. No, none of my close friends or family members have been arrested, charged with a crime, or questioned by police

Respondents indicate which type of proximal interaction they had with the carceral state and this question allowed for multiple selections, meaning that the total amount selected could be tallied out of three. Selecting option four was a zero score.

In addition to proximal contact, the literature shows that participation can be influenced by a number of other key factors, which I include here as control variables. I measured all of

these to be consistent with Walker (2014; 2020). Most important for my hypotheses is race, which, like Walker, I measure as a dichotomous variable, *Nonwhite*, indicating whether the respondent was nonwhite (“1”) or white (“0”). I measure education as a dichotomous variable, *College Graduate* indicating those with a college degree (“1”) and those without (“0”). Party affiliation was measured on the survey through a 7 point Likert scale. Here, I measure party affiliation with two dummy variables, *Republican* (“1”), coding all Republicans (including leaners) as “1”, and all others coded “0”. *Democrat*, includes strong and weak Democrats as well as leaners coded “1,” and all other voters coded “0”. Income is measured in a series of dummy variables, where “1” indicates that the respondent was within the income range and “0” indicates otherwise. I also measure gender as a dichotomous variable, differentiating between *Female* (“1”) and male (“0”). *Age* is also controlled for and is measured in years.

In the following section, I describe the data and test some simple bivariate relationships. I then test my hypotheses in the context of multivariate, OLS Regression models using survey weights to ensure that the results are generalizable to the population as a whole.

Results

A total of 853 individuals participated in both the pre-election and the post-election surveys. There were 483 participants who self-identified as female and 370 participants who identified as male. Of the 853 post-election participants, 635 identified as white, and 218 identified as something other than white--Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, two or more racial categories, other, and Middle Eastern. This paper will use the term nonwhites to include these 218 participants who identified their race as something other than white. Additionally, of the nonwhite participants, Black individuals were the most numerous, with 88 respondents identifying as Black. The survey also included a number of questions relating to possible confounding variables. Race, gender, education, family income, and party ID are included in the Table 2 which includes the summary data of these variables.

Table 2. Summary Statistics of Variables.

| | | % | N |
|----------------------|-----------|------|-----|
| | FREQUENCY | | |
| RACE | | | |
| WHITE | 635 | 74.4 | 635 |
| BLACK | 88 | 10.3 | 88 |
| HISPANIC | 58 | 6.8 | 58 |
| ASIAN | 31 | 3.6 | 31 |
| NATIVE AMERICAN | 6 | 0.7 | 6 |
| TWO OR MORE RACES | 18 | 2.1 | 18 |
| OTHER | 16 | 1.9 | 16 |
| MIDDLE EASTERN | 1 | 0.1 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 853 | 100 | 853 |
| GENDER | | | |
| MALE | 370 | 43.4 | 370 |
| FEMALE | 483 | 56.6 | 483 |
| TOTAL | 853 | 100 | 853 |
| EDUCATION | | | |
| NO HS | 18 | 2.1 | 18 |
| HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE | 200 | 23.4 | 200 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|------|-----|
| SOME COLLEGE | 170 | 19.9 | 170 |
| 2-YEAR | 110 | 12.9 | 110 |
| 4-YEAR | 222 | 26 | 222 |
| POST-GRAD | 133 | 15.6 | 133 |
| TOTAL | 853 | 100 | 853 |
| | | | |
| FAMILY INCOME | | | |
| LESS THAN \$10,000 | 34 | 4 | 34 |
| \$10,000 - \$19,999 | 56 | 6.6 | 56 |
| \$20,000 - \$29,999 | 60 | 7 | 60 |
| \$30,000 - \$39,999 | 92 | 10.8 | 92 |
| \$40,000 - \$49,999 | 77 | 9 | 77 |
| \$50,000 - \$59,999 | 68 | 8 | 68 |
| \$60,000 - \$69,999 | 61 | 7.2 | 61 |
| \$70,000 - \$79,999 | 57 | 6.7 | 57 |
| \$80,000 - \$99,999 | 76 | 8.9 | 76 |
| \$100,000 - \$119,999 | 62 | 7.3 | 62 |
| \$120,000 - \$149,999 | 60 | 7 | 60 |
| \$150,000 - \$199,999 | 37 | 4.3 | 37 |
| \$200,000 - \$249,999 | 13 | 1.5 | 13 |
| \$250,000 - \$349,999 | 6 | 0.7 | 6 |
| \$350,000 - \$499,999 | 4 | 0.5 | 4 |
| \$500,000 OR MORE | 3 | 0.4 | 3 |
| PREFER NOT TO SAY | 87 | 10.2 | 87 |
| TOTAL | 853 | 100 | 853 |
| | | | |
| PARTY ID | | | |
| STRONG DEMOCRAT | 249 | 29.2 | 249 |
| NOT VERY STRONG DEMOCRAT | 83 | 9.7 | 83 |
| LEAN DEMOCRAT | 91 | 10.7 | 91 |
| INDEPENDENT | 118 | 13.8 | 118 |
| LEAN REPUBLICAN | 79 | 9.3 | 79 |
| NOT VERY STRONG REPUBLICAN | 63 | 7.4 | 63 |
| STRONG REPUBLICAN | 148 | 17.4 | 148 |
| NOT SURE | 22 | 2.6 | 22 |
| TOTAL | 853 | 100 | 853 |

Importantly, 89.42 percent of respondents were registered to vote and 85.46 percent answered that they had voted in the 2020 presidential election. These values are above the national

average. Moreover, 41.48 percent of respondents self-identified as Democrats and 39.78 percent identified as Republicans.

Proximal Contact

Specifically, around 26.70 percent of respondents indicated that they had a close friend or family member that was arrested. Slightly less answered that they had a family member or friend charged with a crime, with 20.51 percent selecting this option. Lastly, 24.10 percent indicated that a close friend or family member had been questioned by the police.

Of total post-election participants, 9.73 percent indicated that they had zero proximal contact with the carceral state, 74.56 percent indicated that they had one proximal interaction with the carceral state, and 15.71 percent indicated that they had two proximal interactions. No respondents indicated that they had three proximal contacts with the carceral state. The average number of proximal contacts was 1.05, with an overview of this information included in Table 3

Table 3. Number of Proximal Contacts by White, Nonwhite, and Total.

| <i>Number of Proximal Contacts</i> | <i>White</i> | | <i>Nonwhite</i> | | <i>Total</i> | |
|--|--------------|------|-----------------|------|--------------|-----|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| 0 | 63 | 75.9 | 20 | 24.1 | 83 | 100 |
| 1 | 474 | 74.5 | 162 | 25.5 | 636 | 100 |
| 2 | 98 | 73.1 | 36 | 26.9 | 134 | 100 |
| <i>Total</i> | 635 | 74.4 | 218 | 25.6 | 853 | 100 |

Eighty-three participants answered that they had not had a proximal interaction with the carceral state. Both whites and nonwhites indicated that they had zero proximal interactions, with 9.92 percent and 9.17 percent, respectively, selecting this. Of those who indicated that they had a proximal interaction, the bulk of the tallied scores were one, across racial boundaries with 636 respondents. Among whites and nonwhites, 74.65 percent and 74.31 percent, respectively, marked one proximal contact. One hundred and thirty-four respondents indicated that they had

two proximal contacts with 15.43 percent of white respondents and 16.51 percent of nonwhite participants indicating that they had two proximal interactions. Table 4 shows the difference of means of Nonwhites and Whites for *Proximal* and *Participation*.

Table 4. Difference of Mean Values Between Nonwhites and Whites for Proximal and Participation.

| | <i>Nonwhites</i> | | <i>Whites</i> | |
|----------------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| | N | Mean | N | Mean |
| <i>Proximal</i> | 218 | 1.07 (0.03) | 635 | 1.05 (0.02) |
| <i>Participation</i> | 218 | 1.74 (0.14) | 635 | 2.27 (0.09)*** |

As the table shows above, the difference between white and nonwhite respondents in terms of the number of proximal contacts is not statistically significant. Additionally, the average number of selected proximal interactions for white participants was 1.06, as compared to 1.07 among nonwhite respondents.

Political Participation

Like the proximal contact questions, the participation battery allowed for multiple selections. Participants were encouraged to select all the answers that applied to them. The average number selected was 2.00. Table 5 shows a number of things about the relationship of participation and race among these respondents. Firstly, white respondents (coded as zero) indicated that they participated in 2.27 activities, on average. This is larger than the average total participation of nonwhite respondents, who indicated that they participated in 1.74 activities. Importantly, the difference between them is statistically significant. In this study, white respondents participated more so than nonwhite respondents, and the difference between these two groups is unlikely to have happened due to chance.

For each participation question, it was more likely that respondents not select it than select it. Table 5 on the following page summarizes the responses that indicated that a participant

had participated in this manner to each question overall and by white and nonwhite. It shows the percentage and frequency breakdown for respondents indicating that they had participated in a certain way:

Table 5. Participation Type Selected by White, Nonwhite, and Total.

| <i>Type of Participation</i> | <i>White</i> | | <i>Nonwhite</i> | | <i>Total</i> | |
|--|--------------|------|-----------------|------|--------------|-----|
| | Freq | % | Freq | % | Freq | % |
| <i>Attended a meeting to talk about political or social concerns</i> | 74 | 72.5 | 28 | 27.5 | 102 | 100 |
| <i>Joined in a protest march, rally, or demonstration</i> | 64 | 66.7 | 32 | 33.3 | 96 | 100 |
| <i>Posted a message or comment online about a political issue</i> | 330 | 77.8 | 94 | 22.2 | 424 | 100 |
| <i>Tried to persuade anyone to vote one way or another</i> | 231 | 78 | 65 | 22 | 296 | 100 |
| <i>Given money to any candidate running for public office</i> | 207 | 77.5 | 60 | 22.5 | 267 | 100 |
| <i>Gotten into a political argument with someone</i> | 325 | 80.6 | 78 | 19.4 | 403 | 100 |
| <i>Tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House</i> | 187 | 79.9 | 47 | 20.1 | 234 | 100 |
| <i>Worked to help a candidate or their campaign</i> | 77 | 75.5 | 25 | 24.5 | 102 | 100 |
| <i>Worked with other people to deal with issue facing community</i> | 103 | 69.1 | 46 | 30.9 | 149 | 100 |
| <i>None of these</i> | 219 | 65 | 118 | 35 | 337 | 100 |

Table 6 reports the results of the OLS regression results on the dependent variable *Political Participation*. Model 1 tests Hypothesis 1. Model 2 tests Hypothesis 2 by adding an interaction term. Results reported in Model 1 indicate that the relationship between proximal contact and participation is statistically significant. According to Model 1, each unit increase in proximal contact equates to around a .375 increase in the participation scale. Most basically, as someone comes into greater proximal contact with the carceral state, we can expect to see an increase in their non-electoral political participation. Similarly, the relationship between nonwhites and participation is also statistically significant. This relationship is negative, indicating that when coded as nonwhite (1), one's political participation decreases by .552. These results indicate that nonwhites participate less overall than their white counterparts. The results of Model 1 are visually represented in Figure 1.

The control variables in Model 1 behave as expected. The relationship between the following variables and participation are statistically significant: college graduates, those who identified or leaned Republican, Democrats or Democratic-leaners, those with incomes of sub \$20,000 to \$59,999, and females. College graduates, as compared to non-college graduates lead to an increase in participation. Both self-identified Democrats, Republicans, and their respective learners correspond to an increase in political participation, albeit to varying degrees. Likewise, there is a negative relationship between incomes less than \$20,000 - \$50,000 and political participation, indicating that making below \$60,000 decreases one's political participation.

The regression analysis in Model 2 includes the interaction variable *nonwhite*prox* and thus, has slightly different results than found in Model 1. Specifically, the interaction variable is not statistically significant, thereby indicating that there is not significant relationship between race, proximal contact, and participation. The effect of proximal contact on participation is not

significantly different between white and nonwhite respondents. Within this model, the proximal contact variable is no longer statistically significant. The relationship between nonwhites and participation, however, is still statistically significant. As seen in Model 1, this relationship is negative and indicates that as one is coded as nonwhite, their political participation decreases by 1.080, thus also indicating that nonwhites participate less than their white counterparts.

When the interaction variable *nonwhite*proximal* is added to the OLS regression analysis in Model 2, there is a slight change in the coefficients of the control variables. Even so, the variables continue to act as expected and similarly to how they do in Model 1. The exception to this is the proximal variable, which is no longer statistically significant and is explained in the previous paragraph.

**Table 6. OLS Regression Results for the Political Participation of 2020 CES
Respondents Survey Weighted Estimates.**

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
| Number of Proximal Contacts | 0.375 | 0.259 |
| | (0.161)** | (0.165) |
| Nonwhite | -0.552 | -1.079 |
| | (0.196)*** | (0.425)** |
| Nonwhite * Proximal | | 0.491 |
| | | (0.412) |
| Republican | 0.445 | 0.427 |
| | (0.207)** | (0.202)** |
| Democrat | 1.453 | 1.453 |
| | (0.192)*** | (0.192)*** |
| Inc. <\$20,000 | -0.547 | -0.554 |
| | (0.240)** | (0.241)** |
| Inc. \$20,000 - \$39,999 | -0.648 | -0.681 |
| | (0.234)*** | (0.228)*** |
| Inc. \$40,000 - \$59,999 | -0.573 | -0.581 |
| | (0.220)*** | (0.221)*** |
| Inc. \$60,000 - \$79,999 | -0.242 | -0.249 |
| | (0.252) | (0.253) |
| Inc. \$80,000 - \$99,999 | -0.045 | -0.053 |
| | (0.327) | (0.327) |
| College Graduate | 0.671 | 0.665 |
| | (0.161)*** | (0.161)*** |
| Age | -0.003 | -0.002 |
| | (0.004) | (0.004) |
| Female | -0.432 | -0.433 |
| | (0.150)*** | (0.150)*** |
| Constant | 1.334 | 1.466 |
| | (0.394)*** | (0.396)*** |
| R^2 | 0.17 | 0.17 |
| N | 853 | 853 |

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

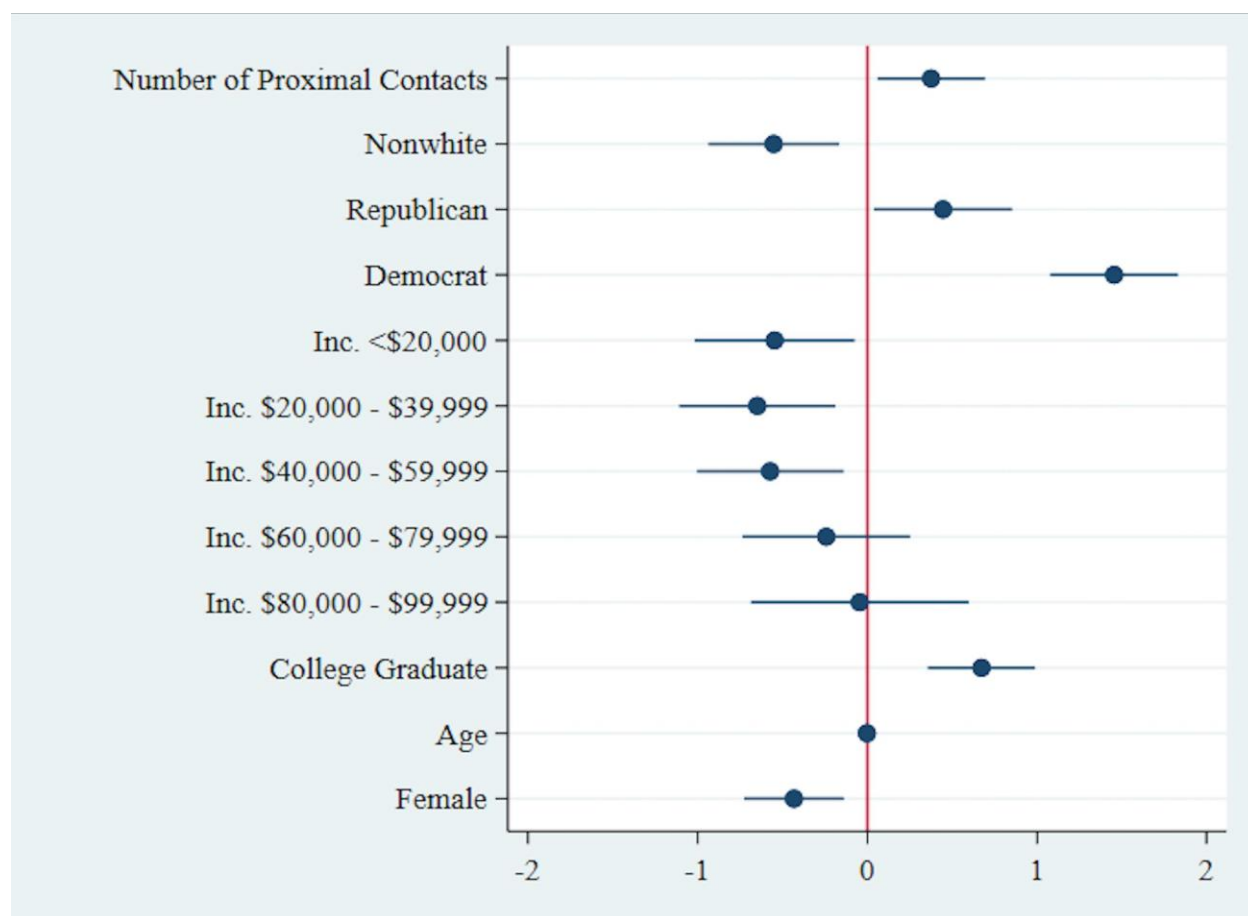
Figure 1. Visual Results of Model One OLS Regression.

Figure 2. Predicted Level of Participation per Proximal Contact.

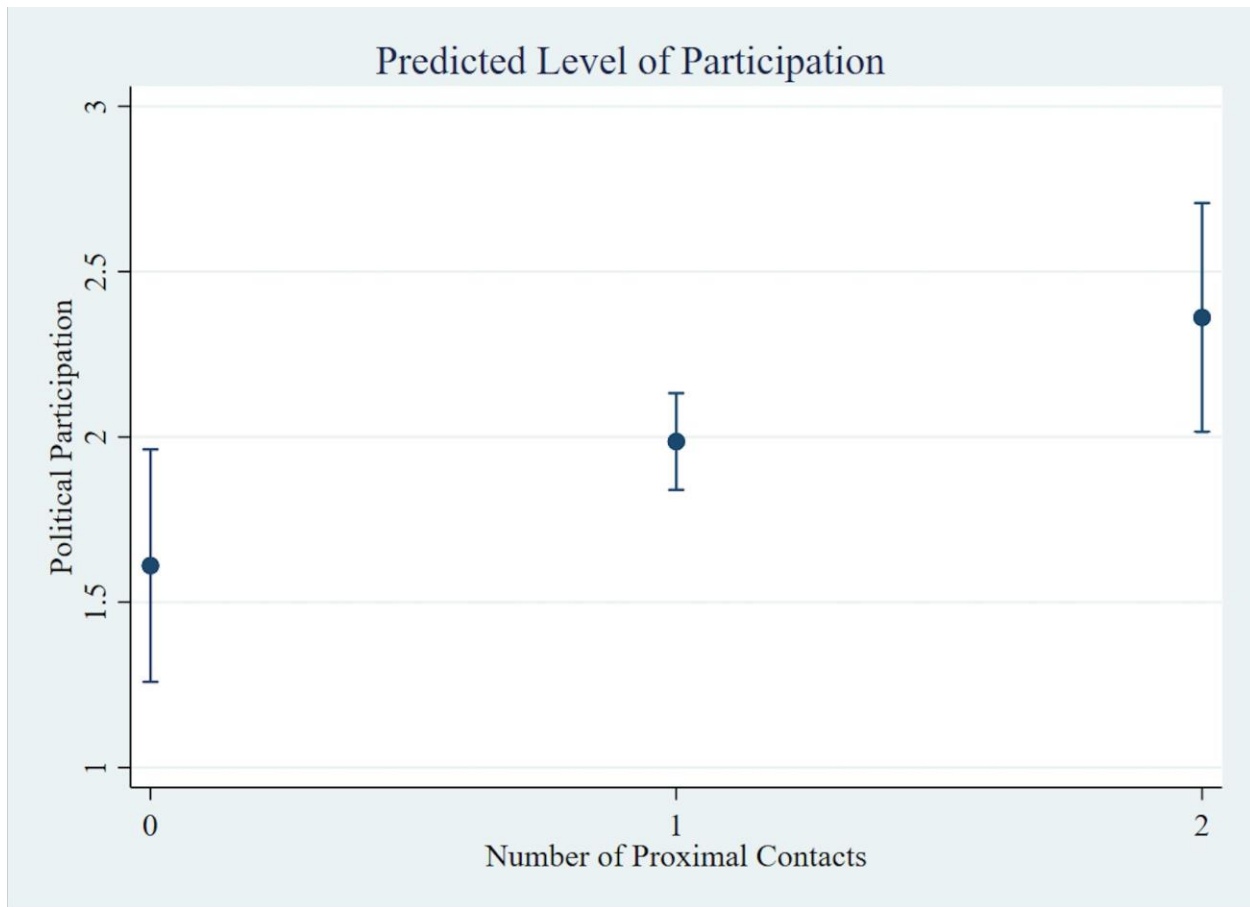


Figure 2 displays the predicted level of participation depending on the amount of proximal contact, based on results from Model 1. Importantly, it does not include three proximal contacts nor their predicted participation value. This is because no respondents selected that they had three proximal contacts. The figure indicates that as the number of proximal contacts increases, so too does the level of political participation.

Conclusion

The data described in the previous section tells us something about each hypothesis in this study. Firstly, the results indicate that proximal contact with the carceral state increases one's political participation in non-electoral ways. Secondly, my analysis does not support that the effect of proximal contact with the carceral state on someone's political participation is greater among nonwhites than it is among whites. The interaction variable's relationship with participation is not statistically significant. When controlling for all other variables, there is not a significant relationship between race, proximal contact, and political participation. Additionally, the data also shows a statistically significant relationship between race and participation, thereby indicating that whites participate more than their nonwhite counterparts.

During the summer of 2020, increased calls for racial justice swept through the United States and created waves felt around the world. People marched, protested, and organized to a larger degree and were visible to a larger audience than experienced in recent years. Importantly, more people were in contact with the carceral state and on a wider stage than in recent memory. This study aimed to learn more about proximal exposure to the carceral state and its impact on people's non-electoral political participation. Very little existing scholarship looked into the relationship between proximal carceral contact and political participation, with the bulk of the research focusing on direct contact and its effects on voting behavior. My study found that while there did not appear to be a significant relationship between race, proximal contact, and political participation, there was a positive relationship between proximal contact and participation. That is to say, as one's proximal contacts with the carceral state increase, so too does their political participation in non-electoral ways.

Certainly, there are limitations to this study that must be considered. The statistical analysis I used is not complex and may not be robust to changes in the model. More complex and detailed statistical analysis is necessary to better support the results of this research or in future replication. Additionally, the participants in the study voted at higher levels than the U.S. average, perhaps indicating that the sample was already more likely to be participating. Future studies should also breakdown the data further by racial group to better understand how different racial and ethnic groups experience the carceral system and political participation. Doing so will provide a deeper understanding about the specific relationships that may or may not exist between certain racial and ethnic groups and the carceral state. Treating nonwhites as a monolith to be compared to whites has certain implications that may hide relationships among the variety of identities included under the umbrella term “nonwhite”. Likewise, much of the current research on the criminal justice system focuses on the experiences of Black Americans. Due to the low number of Black participants in this study, it cannot focus directly on this group. Future renditions of this project should look at this relationship more closely.

Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between proximal carceral contact and participation. My results suggest that there are measurable indirect effects of the carceral state that are being experienced by everyday Americans--namely, the carceral state is impacting how individuals interact with the political sphere of the state. Knowing the size and reach of this system, there are perhaps other areas that it could be affecting, both directly and indirectly. By recognizing the potential influence the carceral state can have on the lives of Americans, other state institutions can work to counteract such consequences--should they be negative--or capitalize on them. Most importantly, better understanding the implications of a far-reaching carceral state can help inform important reforms and policy changes in the future.

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